

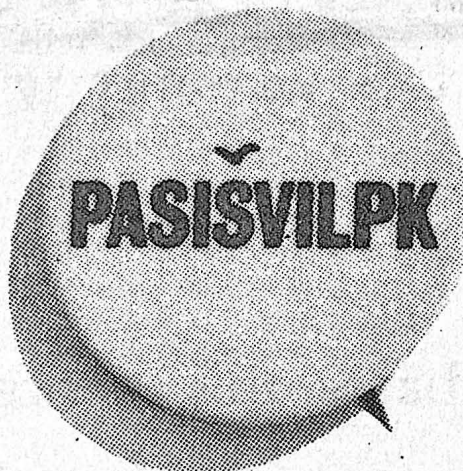
# Vilnius to Moscow:

By John V. Chervokas

**A**lthough I have yet to set foot on Lithuanian soil, I spoke its language before I spoke English. Raised in a warm and proud Lithuanian community in Massachusetts, my first words were "mamyte" and "elis," rather than "mommy" and "daddy."

Fifty years later, I still revel, albeit a bit less grammatically, in the language that some scholars say may be the world's oldest spoken language. Indeed, Lithuanian is a curiously intriguing tongue, many of its words having a kinship with Sanskrit. Lithuanian is expressive, fairly easy

*John V. Chervokas is executive vice president of Sudler & Hennessey, a health care advertising agency.*



on the ear and rather colorful.

In fact, there is one Lithuanian expression from my childhood that seems to have been created especially for this moment in time. My grandfather would use the word whenever he had enough of my pestering him in his orchard. My grand-

mother used the word often as she once again caught me snitching potato pancakes from her frying pan.

"Pasisvilpk," they would say. "Pasisvilpk, Jonukai." Literally, the word means "go whistle." Idiomatically, it means "buzz off," "go fly a kite."

I have had the word printed on a button that I'm wearing these days. People ask me about the curious word with the little bird-in-flight symbol over the second "s." I tell them that the symbol means that the second "s" should be pronounced "sh." It's "pah-si-shvilpk." And I am happy, naturally, to explain the meaning of "pasisvilpk" to any and all who ask about it.

I wonder if they are using the word much in Vilnius these days. I wonder if the Lithuanian President, Vytautas Landsbergis, would like one of my "pasisvilpk" buttons. It seems the perfect response to "perestroika." □